




POLICY PAPER


How Can Gas from the Eastern Mediterranean Help the EU To Diversify Its Energy Sources

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Background

The Eastern Mediterranean Sea was long assumed to be rich in natural gas given its proximity to major gas deposits in the Middle East and North Africa. However, the region attracted little interest by energy companies in the past, as technological limitations prohibited any deepwater extraction projects. Nonetheless, as the existing natural gas reservoirs in the North Sea were depleting¹ and deepwater drilling technology progressed, Europe turned its attention to the Eastern Mediterranean as a potential alternative gas supplier. Initial estimates had the Levantine and Delta Nile Basins containing of up to 3.450² and 6.300³ billion cubic meters (bcm) of potentially retrievable natural gas respectively led to a lot of optimism for the region's potential. For context, the Groningen gas field contained around 2.800 bcm of proved reserves, while the EU consumed 356⁴ bcm and imported approximately 130 bcm of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) in 2022⁵.

Israel was the first Eastern Mediterranean country in to 2009 to announce a commercially viable gas field within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Tamar is located near the Israeli shores and contains 250 billion cubic meters (bcm) of recoverable gas. A year later, Israel announced the Leviathan gas field, almost double the size of Tamar⁶. Leviathan's location near the Cypriot EEZ gave hope that a similarly sized economically viable gas field could be found within Cypriot borders in the future. Finally, Egypt announced the Zohr gas field in 2015 containing 850 bcm of gas, being the largest in the Mediterranean Sea. Since then, more minor gas reservoirs have been found in Cyprus, Israel and Egypt, permitting an annual production that greatly exceeds the region's annual consumption. Consequently, the Eastern Mediterranean countries immediately sought ways to export gas to the European market.

Türkiye: economically sound, politically unviable

One of the projects that was initially considered, was the construction of an underwater gas pipeline connecting Israel's Leviathan gas field with Türkiye. A Turkish-Israeli gas pipeline provided many advantages. To begin with, Türkiye's adjacency to the Israeli and its nearby Egyptian gas fields meant that the creation of an underwater pipeline connecting Eastern Mediterranean gas fields to southeastern Türkiye would be of relative low cost. Moreover, the existing Southern Gas Corridor connecting Azerbaijan to Italy, meant that there was already the infrastructure necessary to transport gas from mainland Türkiye to Europe. Finally, the land pipeline would provide the best economy of scale, driving supply costs down.

¹ Netherland Oil and Gas portal. (2023, July 4). Figures and facts about gas extraction in Groningen.

<https://dashboardgroningen.nl/>

² Schenk, C.J., Kirschbaum, M.A., Charpentier, R.R., Klett, T.R., Brownfield, M.E., Pitman, J.K., Cook, T.A., and Tennyson, M.E. (2010). Assessment of undiscovered oil and gas resources of the Levant Basin Province, Eastern Mediterranean.

[USGS Fact Sheet 2010-3014: Assessment of Undiscovered Oil and Gas Resources of the Levant Basin Province, Eastern Mediterranean](https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2010/3014/pdf/FS10-3014.pdf)

³ Schenk, C.J., Kirschbaum, M.A., Charpentier, R.R., Klett, T.R., Brownfield, M.E., Pitman, J.K., Cook, T.A., and Tennyson, M.E. (2010). Assessment of undiscovered oil and gas resources of the Nile Delat Basin Province, Eastern Mediterranean.

<https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2010/3027/pdf/FS10-3027.pdf>

⁴ Eurostat. (2022). Supply, transformation and consumption of gas-monthly data.

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/NRG_CB_GASM_custom_6040560/default/table?lang=en

⁵ European Commission. (2022). Quarterly Report on European Gas Markets Report Q4 2022.

[https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-](https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/Quarterly%20Report%20on%20European%20Gas%20Markets%20report%20Q4%202022.pdf)

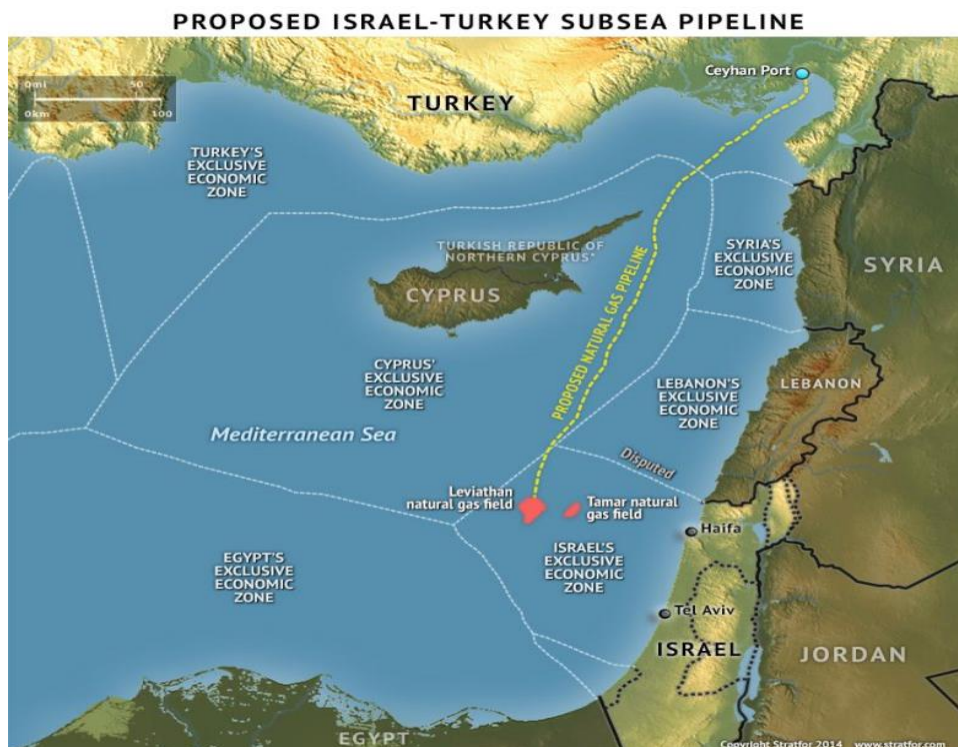
[05/Quarterly%20Report%20on%20European%20Gas%20Markets%20report%20Q4%202022.pdf](https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/Quarterly%20Report%20on%20European%20Gas%20Markets%20report%20Q4%202022.pdf)

⁶ Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure of Israel. (2022). Oil and Natural Gas E&P in Israel. <https://www.energy-sea.gov.il/home/oil-natural-gas-e-p-in-israel/>

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Nonetheless, despite Israel beginning negotiations with Türkiye in 2015, political turmoil has prohibited the project from becoming a reality. Firstly, a potential solution has been complicated by worsened Israeli-Turkish ties in recent years. The traditionally amicable relations quickly deteriorated in 2010, when the Gaza flotilla incident saw 8 Turkish nationals being killed by Israeli authorities⁷. Since then, rapprochement efforts have failed to deliver, as Israel became wary of Erdogan's growing close ties with Hamas⁸. Moreover, Erdogan's close ties with the Muslim Brotherhood⁹ combined with Egypt's ambitions to become an energy hub in the region, has made it quite unlikely for the secular government in Egypt to choose them as their energy partner.

As of yet, Egypt and Israel have developed closer ties with Greece and Cyprus in their efforts to exploit and export their natural gas sources. Furthermore, the likely passing of a potential Israeli-Turkish gas pipeline through the unrecognised Northern Cyprus, would at best cause frustration to the Republic of Cyprus, if not raise questions over violating ownership claims over the island. Finally, Türkiye's refusal to condemn Hamas' terrorist actions on the 7th of October 2023¹⁰, means that Israel will not be willing to negotiate any project passing through Türkiye.



EastMed: a pipe dream

The Eastern Mediterranean pipeline (EastMed) is a series of proposed gas pipeline projects aiming to connect the Eastern Mediterranean gas fields with the European market through Cyprus and Greece.

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. (2010, May 31). Press release regarding the use of Force by the Israeli Defense Forces against the humanitarian aid fleet to Gaza. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no-115-31-may-2010--press-release-regarding-the-use-of-force-by-the-israeli-defense-forces-against-the-humanitarian-aid-fleet-to-gaza.en.mfa>

⁸ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2021, August 25). Press Releases: Hamas operations in Turkey. <https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/General/hamas-operations-in-turkey>

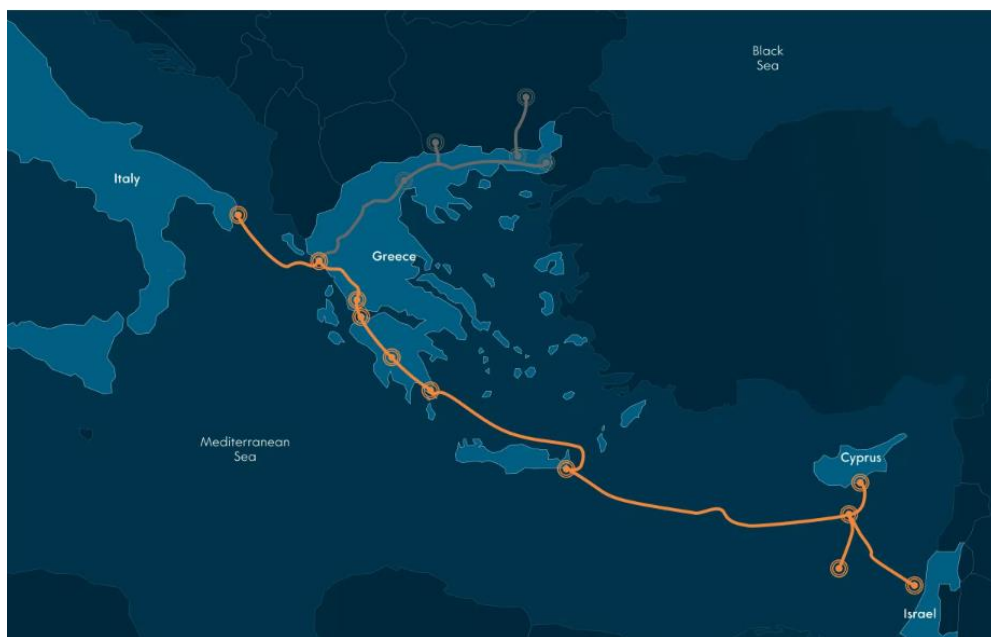
⁹ State information service of the Arab Republic of Egypt. (2019, September 25). <https://sis.gov.eg/Story/141731/MOFA-strongly-deplores-Erdogan's-remarks-about-Egypt?lang=en-us>

¹⁰ Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2023, November 4). Press Releases: Turkey recalls ambassador for consultation. <https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/news/returning-the-turkish-ambassador-from-israel>

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The project would begin by connecting the Leviathan (Israel) and Aphrodite (Cyprus) gas fields with mainland Cyprus where a compressor station would be constructed. From Cyprus, the pipeline would continue to Crete and northern Greece, ending up in Italy through the Poseidon pipeline. Since 2015, EastMed has been designated by the European Commission as a Project of Common Interest (PCI) providing funding to fulfil the technical studies necessary for the project to commence.

The project was designed to provide 12 bcm/year, with the possibility to expand to up to 20 bcm/year. In 2017 Israel, Cyprus, Greece, and Italy signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in order to make it a reality. In 2020, Cyprus and Israel approved the construction of the pipeline, a move that was then backed by the US. However, concerns over the political stability of the region led the USA to withdraw their support in 2022¹¹. From the beginning, Türkiye was heavily against the EastMed, as it went against their own ambition of becoming an energy hub, while passing through contested maritime territory and ignoring the interests of the Turkish Cypriots¹².



As of yet, political turmoil and infrastructure constrain have not allowed the Eastern Mediterranean from becoming an alternative supplier of gas to the European market. At the aftermath of Russia's invasion to Ukraine, EU's dependence on Russian gas was used a tool of assertion by Putin¹³. In response, the Commission has set an ambitious goal of rapidly diversify away from Russian gas towards other reliable energy suppliers¹⁴.

¹¹ [Statement on East Med Energy Cooperation - U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Greece \(usembassy.gov\)](https://usembassy.gov)

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. (2020, January 2). Statement of the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Hami Aksoy, in Response to a Question Regarding the Signature of the Agreement on the EastMed Project. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sc-1-eastmed-projesine-ili%C5%9Fkin-anlasmanin-imzalanmasi-hk-sc.en.mfa>

¹³ European Commission. (2022, April 27). Press statement by President Von der Leyen following the announcement by Gazprom on the disruption of gas deliveries to certain EU Member States.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_22_2685

¹⁴ European Commission. (2022, September 7). Statement by President von der Leyen on energy.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_22_5389

Current State of Play

Since the start of the War in Ukraine, the EU and its Member States have signed over 50 agreements concerning gas or LNG with third countries¹⁵. However, given accelerating rollout of renewable energy and the improvement in energy storage technology, the Union has been less willing to bind itself to long-term contract. Thus, the EU has mostly sought to import natural gas from countries with existing infrastructure capable to meet EU's immediate needs, mainly the USA¹⁶, Norway¹⁷, and UAE¹⁸. Nonetheless, the Eastern Mediterranean gas fields could play a complementary role to EU's efforts to diversify its energy sources.

Gas fields and infrastructure in the Eastern Mediterranean:

As of now, Israel is the country that has progressed the most in exploiting its gas reserves, having steadily increased gas production over the years from the Tamar and Leviathan gas fields that came online in 2013 and 2019 respectively¹⁹. By 2022, Israel's annual production reached 21 out of 900 bcm of recoverable gas in reserves. 12 bcm was used to cover its internal needs, while 9 bcm was exported to Egypt and Jordan via the Arish-Ashkelon pipeline²⁰. Similarly, in its efforts to become a regional energy hub, Egypt has built an LNG terminal in Idku capable of exporting of up to 10 bcm per year²¹.

Moreover, Egypt has signed a MoU with the EU that formalised mechanisms that were established in previous agreements, aiming to increase LNG exports to the EU by up to 5 bcm per year²². However, limited gas extraction on the Egyptian side, combined with a growing internal gas demand as a result of Egypt's economic and population growth, might hinder Egypt's effort to meaningfully contribute to the EU gas mix in the near future.

Finally, despite being the only Member State in the region, Cyprus is the one lacking the most in terms of gas infrastructure. As of yet, the Aphrodite gas field containing approximately 100 bcm is expected to come online in 2024, with the country planning to export its gas to Egypt and the

¹⁵ European Council on Foreign Relations (2022, November). EU Energy Deals Tracker. <https://ecfr.eu/special/energy-deals-tracker/>

¹⁶ European Commission. (2023, April 3). EU-U.S. Task Force on Energy Security: one year on. https://energy.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-us-task-force-energy-security-one-year-2023-04-03_en

¹⁷ European Commission (2022, June 23). Joint EU-Norway statement on strengthening energy cooperation. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_22_3975

¹⁸ United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2022, September 26). UAE president and German Chancellor witness signing of ne Energy Security and Industry Accelerator Agreement. <https://www.mofa.gov.ae/en/mediahub/news/2022/9/26/26-09-2022-uae-germany>

¹⁹ Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure of the state of Israel. (2019, December 22). The Ministry of Energy approves the operational start-up of natural gas flow from the Leviathan field. https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/ng_191219

²⁰ Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure of the state of Israel. (2023). Oil & Natural Gas E&P in Israel. <https://www.energy-sea.gov.il/home/oil-natural-gas-e-p-in-israel/>

²¹ Service Information Service of the Arab Republic of Egypt. (2022, June 1). Future chances for turning Egypt into regional energy hub after the Ukrainian crisis. <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/167124/Future-chances-for-turning-Egypt-into-regional-energy-hub-after-Ukrainian-crisis?lang=en-us>

²² European Commission. (2022, June 15). Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation related to trade, transport, and export of natural gas to the European Union between the EU, the Arab Republic of Egypt, and the State of Israel. <https://energy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/MoU%20EU%20Egypt%20Israel.pdf>

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European market²³. Furthermore, Cyprus is continuing its research for additional gas fields within its EEZ, mainly in the promising Glaucus²⁴ gas field near the Egyptian EEZ.



Political turmoil:

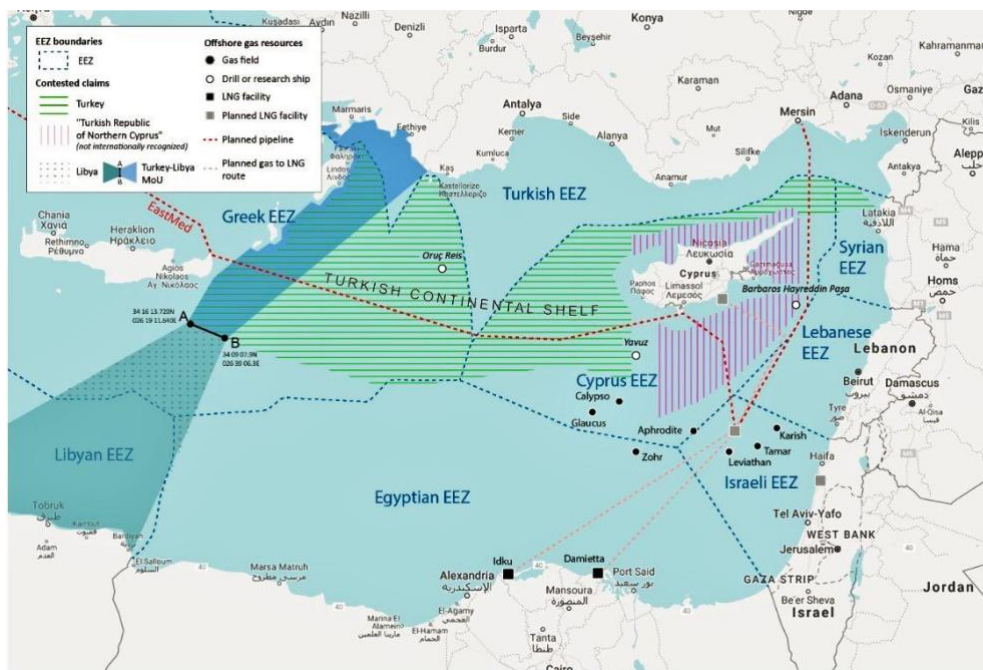
The biggest factor that prevents the region from reaching its potential as a gas provider to Europe, is political turmoil. Firstly, despite good bilateral relations, Israel and Cyprus have not yet been able to agree on how to divide the revenue from the Aphrodite gas field in Cyprus that partly falls within Israeli EEZ. In addition, major political differences between Cyprus and Türkiye prohibited energy companies on many occasions from fulfilling their plans. More specifically, Türkiye's refusal to recognise the republic of Cyprus and its EEZ, combined with their willingness to intervene to any energy plans that do not take into consideration the Turkish-Cypriot community, had on many occasions delayed Cypriot efforts to further their extraction plans.

Finally, the recent war between Israel and Hamas could further destabilise the region. Already the Israeli government was forced to temporarily close the Tamar gas field due to security concerns. Consequently, Israeli gas exports to Egypt have sharply declined over the last month, as Israel is looking to cover its own needs with only one of the two major gas fields in operation. Nonetheless, as long as the ongoing conflict does not escalate further it is unlikely that it will hinder any long-term energy plans in the region, as any energy project will take some time to become fully operational regardless.

²³ Ministry of Energy, Commerce, and Industry of the Republic of Cyprus. (2022, July 21). Joint Statement by the Ministry of Energy, Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Cyprus and Chevron Cyprus Limited (Chevron). <https://meci.gov.cy/en/useful-information/ministry-press-releases/joint-statement-by-the-ministry-of-energy-commerce-and-industry-of-the-republic-of-cyprus-and-chevron-cyprus-limited-chevron>

²⁴ Ministry of Energy, Commerce, and Industry of the Republic of Cyprus. (2022, March 21). Επιτυχής η γεώτρηση αξιολόγησης <<Glaucus-2>> στο Τεμάχιο 10 της ΑΟΖ. <https://meci.gov.cy/en/useful-information/ministry-press-releases/434/?ctype=ar>

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To conclude, the main things hindering EU's efforts to diversify its energy sources by importing natural gas from the Eastern Mediterranean, is the current conflict in Israel, Egypt's growing demand for natural gas that limits its exports capabilities, and Cyprus lack of infrastructure capable of assisting the Union with its gas needs. With that in mind, the EU should make sure than no political differences prohibit the region from meeting its goals of becoming gas exporter to the European market. Moreover, it is important that more of the gas from the region ends up in the Union directly and not through third countries that would use gas internally instead. With that in mind, the Union should push for a new pipeline connecting Israeli and Cypriot gas directly to Cyprus, while created the necessary facilities to further export gas directly to the continent.

Policy Recommendation

As new green energy sources come online, the EU will gradually rely less on imports to meet its energy needs. Therefore, speed is of utmost importance for the Union's effort to find alternative gas sources as it seeks to move away from Russian gas. With that in mind, any efforts to make the Eastern Mediterranean a gas supplier to Europe, will have to take into account the existing political and infrastructural situation in the region.

Aphrodite-Yishai Dispute:

Despite good relations between Israel and Cyprus, the two countries have not yet been able to overcome all bilateral issues. One such case is the Aphrodite-Yishai dispute. Approximately 10% of the Aphrodite gas field (known as Yishai in Israel) falls within the Israeli EEZ. The potential revenue for the Israeli side would exceed 1 billion €. The Israeli government has given three Israeli companies the rights of exploitation in the relevant EEZ blocks, while the Cypriot side has given the rights to Shell and Noble in 2019. A few days after the Cypriot agreement, the Israeli Ministry of Energy send a letter to the partner companies, urging them to not begin development till an agreement has been reached. In contrast, the Cypriot side wants to have a link between the progress made in the Aphrodite gas field and an agreement with Israel on the issue. In light of the Russian invasion, the two parties

have tried to push again for an agreement but have not managed thus far²⁵. Given the legal and technical complexity of the issue, as well as the fact that the EU has no competence, little can be made on that front, besides pushing the two countries to negotiate in good faith. If no agreement can be reached, then the dispute could be referred to international experts to seek a solution within a reasonable timeframe²⁶. Regardless, the dispute should in no way prohibit Cyprus from any development in the Aphrodite gas field.

Turkish-Cypriot maritime zone disputes:

Article 121.2 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) states that “the territorial sea, the contiguous zone, the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf of an island are determined in accordance with the provisions of this Convention applicable to other land territory”.

In accordance to UNCLOS that codified existing customary international law, the Republic of Cyprus has extended its territorial sea to establish 12 nautical miles, while reaching agreements over its southern and western limits of the Cypriot EEZ with Egypt²⁷ and Israel²⁸. Soon after, Cyprus gave rights to major energy companies to explore and exploit any potential gas field within the Cypriot EEZ, as was the case with the Aphrodite gas field.

In contrast, Türkiye has not signed the UNCLOS mainly due to its stance that no island (including Cyprus) has the capacity to generate any maritime zones besides territorial sea²⁹. More importantly though, Türkiye does not recognise the Republic of Cyprus as the legitimate government of the whole island³⁰. Consequently, it does not recognise the Republic of Cyprus’ delimitation agreements with its neighbours³¹. As of right now, there is a lot of overlap between Türkiye’s and Cypriot claims over the extent of their respective EEZs, including a part of the Aphrodite gas field, leading to Türkiye harassing Cypriot contracted vessels on multiple occasions. Finally, the Turkish side believes that the Turkish-Cypriots as co-owners of the island, should benefit from any gas exploitation that happens within Cypriot EEZ³².

²⁵ Ministry of Energy, Commerce, and Industry of the Republic of Cyprus. (2022, September 19). Joint announcement of Ministries of Energy of Cyprus and Israel regarding the negotiations over “Aphrodite” and “Yishai”.

<https://meci.gov.cy/en/useful-information/minister-press-office/joint-press-release-of-the-ministries-of-energy-of-cyprus-and-israel-on-today-s-negotiations-regarding-the-aphrodite-%E2%80%93-yishai-issue>

²⁶ Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure of the State of Israel. (2021, March 9). Minister Steinitz and Cyprus reach an agreement on the Aphrodite-Yishai dispute. https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/press_090321

²⁷ UN Treaty Series. (2003, February 17). Agreement between the Republic of Cyprus and the Arab Republic of Egypt on the Delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone.

<https://www.un.org/depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/TREATIES/EGY-CYP2003EZ.pdf>

²⁸ UN Treaty Series. (2011, March 9). Treaties and international agreements registered or filed and recorded with the Secretariat of the United Nations No. 48387. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%202740/v2740.pdf>

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye (2019, September 17). Maritime Delimitation offshore activities presentation: legal and political framework turkey’s views and opinions.

https://www.mfa.gov.tr/site_media/html/Maritime-Delimitation-Offshore-Activities-Presentation-17-September-2019.pdf

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. Cyprus issue overview. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-cyprus-issue-overview.en.mfa>

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. (2010, December 21). Press Release Regarding the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Delimitation Agreement Signed Between Greek Cypriot Administration and Israel.

https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-288_-21-december-2010_-press-release-regarding-the-exclusive-economic-zone- eeZ_-delimitation-agreement--signed-between-greek-cypriot-administration-and-israel.en.mfa#:~:text=Most%20recently%2C%20Greek%20Cypriot%20Administration,under%20way%20for%20some%20time.

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye. The Cyprus issue: Current Developments.

https://www.mfa.gov.tr/kibris_ta-2008-yilinda-baslayan-muzakere-sureci-ve-guncel-durum.en.mfa

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The EU recognises Cyprus' right to develop its resources. In the past, the EU Foreign Ministers have placed sanctions on entities involved in unauthorised drilling within Cypriot EEZ³³. While that is in the positive direction, a more concise permanent sanction mechanism should be developed if the Union wishes to effectively prevent Türkiye from any attempts to prevent Cyprus' progress in its energy ambitions. After all, any delay on Cyprus' efforts to extract gas from its EEZ, is a delay of exporting gas to the rest of the EU.

Finally, the Republic of Cyprus has a responsibility to provide economic benefits from any gas exploitation to the Turkish-Cypriots as co-owners of the island. After all, according to the EU, Turkish-Cypriots are Cypriots (and therefor European) citizens that just so happen to live in areas outside of the control of the Republic of Cyprus³⁴.

The General Affairs Council in 26 April 2004 stated on the issue that "The Turkish Cypriot community have expressed their clear desire for a future within the European Union. The Council is determined to put an end to the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community and to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus by encouraging the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community. The Council invited the Commission to bring forward comprehensive proposals to this end with particular emphasis on the economic integration of the island and on improving contact between the two communities and with the EU³⁵."

Akinci's proposal for a joint committee on hydrocarbons consisting of members from both communities could be a basis. The proposal stated "The Joint Committee (JC) shall establish a Joint Hydrocarbon Trust Fund (JHTF). All hydrocarbon revenues of the Island will be deposited to the JHTF. Without prejudice to the agreed share ration, the JHTF shall decide on the utilization of the JHTF to ensure that a significant portion of the revenues will be reserved to finance in the future the solution of the property issue under a comprehensive settlement, as well as to finance both current and future projects which will help ensure equal level of development of both sides. The guidelines agreed between Archbishop Makarios and President Denktas on 12 February 1977 stated that "We are seeking an independent, non-aligned, bi-communal Federal Republic³⁶".

However, given Tatar's recent insistence in favouring a two-state solution for Cyprus³⁷, it would be more prudent to create a fund that could be used for the benefit of the Turkish-Cypriotes once they return to negotiating for a bi-communal Federal Republic of Cyprus, in accordance to the UN agreements³⁸.

³³ European Union External Action. (2019, April 4). Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Frederica Mogherini on Turkey's intended drilling activities within the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/61836_en

³⁴ European Commission Representation in Cyprus. Turkish Cypriot Community. https://cyprus.representation.ec.europa.eu/about-us/turkish-cypriot-community_en

³⁵ General Affairs Council. (2004, April 26). [file:///C:/Users/achva/Downloads/2576th_Council_meeting_-_General_Affairs_-_Luxembourg_26_April_2004%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/achva/Downloads/2576th_Council_meeting_-_General_Affairs_-_Luxembourg_26_April_2004%20(2).pdf)

³⁶ Office of the President of the TRNC. (2019, July 13). The Turkish Cypriot proposal on the issue of the hydrocarbon resources around the Island. <https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/akinci-to-juncker.pdf>

³⁷ Presidency of TRNC. (2021, April 29). Statement from the TRNC President Ersin Tatar. <https://kktcb.org/en/statement-from-the-trnc-president-ersin-tatar-8322>

³⁸ UN Secretariat. (1978, July 15). Items in Cyprus- Chronological files. <https://search.archives.un.org/uploads/r/united-nations-archives/8/a/b/8ab2124701086a94967ea5efbad41506fd8c801c8921564c88b39249e2779853/S-0903-0006-09-00001.pdf>

LNG exports to the EU

Politics aside, the existing infrastructure does not suffice for the region to effectively supply gas to the European market. So far, the Israeli gas that is in excess, is sent to Egypt, only then to be exported to the EU. However, Egypt's excessive reliance on gas means that on many occasions, the country would seek to prioritise its internal demands before exporting it to the European market. With that in mind, the existing support measures that the EU is providing to Egypt are important, both for the stability of the region and to allow Egypt to export gas to Europe. After all, at the moment Egypt is the only country in the region that has the capacity to export gas to the EU through the Idku LNG terminal.

Nonetheless, Idku's limited capacity of 10 bcm/year, combined with Egypt's growing gas needs, make it a necessity for the EU to be able to directly import gas from the region as well.

Consequently, the EU should push for a pipeline connecting Israel's Tamar and Leviathan with Aphrodite gas field directly to mainland Cyprus. Major benefit from such a proposal, is the fact that the IGI Poseidon has already made all the technical studies³⁹ with the help of the PCI programme under the EastMed pipeline project⁴⁰. Such a pipeline to Cyprus could be built with a capacity of up to 20 bcm/year in accordance to the EastMed project, while the length of the pipeline would make it a relatively cheap option. Once in mainland Cyprus, an LNG export facility constructed in the island could provide the gas directly to the European market.

Conclusion:

To conclude, there are significant natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean that have the potential to assist the EU in its effort to diversify its gas sources. However, existing infrastructural constraints and political tensions could limit the region's potential in becoming an energy hub for gas. In order to overcome said obstacles, the EU should push Cyprus and Israel to solve bilateral issues regarding the Israeli-Yishai dispute. In addition, the Union should provide a firm stance against Türkiye's attempts to hinder Cyprus' plans to exploit its gas fields. Finally, a new pipeline should be created that connects Israeli and Cypriot gas fields with Cyprus, in order to directly export it to the European market afterwards.

³⁹ IGI Poseidon. EastMed-Poseidon: A Multi-Source Project. <https://igi-poseidon.com/project/eastmed-poseidon/>

⁴⁰ European Commission, (2021, November 19). Fifth PCI list https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/infrastructure/projects-common-interest/key-cross-border-infrastructure-projects_en

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